OXFORD CONFERENCE STUDY SERIES

based on

The Message and Reports of the Oxford Conference on Church, Community and State

THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

UNIVERSAL CHRISTIAN COUNCIL
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PREFACE TO THE SERIES

For more than a quarter of a century the Christian churches have been drawing together. The impulse given by the great Missionary Conference of Edinburgh, 1910, has borne fruit in two parallel movements: one concerned with the life and work of the Church, the other with its faith and order. These movements culminated in two great conferences, held in Great Britain in the summer of 1937. The first, which was held in Oxford in July, took place under the auspices of the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work and had for its subject CHURCH, COMMUNITY, AND STATE. It was the successor of the Stockholm Conference of 1925, which inaugurated what has come to be known as the Life and Work Movement. The second was held in Edinburgh in August of the same year under the auspices of the Continuation Committee of Faith and Order, a body which owed its initiation to the Lausanne Conference of 1927. Both Conferences united in recommending to the churches the creation of a World Council of Churches which should carry on the work now being done by the two movements separately.

The Oxford Conference was concerned primarily with the relation of the churches to the world outside, the Edinburgh Conference with their relation to one another. Each considered a number of important questions and made weighty recommendations which concern the churches as a whole. In order to facilitate the study of these recommendations by churches and educational institutions two sets of studies are being prepared: one dealing with Oxford, the other with Edinburgh. In the present series, the first five booklets are based on the findings of Oxford while the sixth booklet is based on the findings of both Oxford and Edinburgh. The users of each pamphlet (study) are urged to read the entire text of the report contained in it before commencing the study outlines.

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INTRODUCTION TO NATURE AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

The central topic of the Ecumenical Conferences, both at Oxford and Edinburgh, was, obviously, the Church. This was formally expressed in the Oxford title, "Conference on Church, Community and State"; while the officially adopted subject of the Edinburgh Conference—though it was not actually used in the program—was "The Church and the Purpose of God." (Minutes of 1934 meeting of the Continuation Committee, Hertenstein, Switzerland, Publication No. 71.) But at neither Conference did the Church appear as a topic for formal discussion on the program.

The unfortunate consequences of this omission were recognized by outstanding men both at Oxford and Edinburgh. An official book by two of the most influential Oxford leaders had been circulated to the delegates just in advance of that Conference under the title, "The Church and Its Function in Society."(*) Its preface declared the specific topics of the Conference could be profitably considered only in the light of these fundamental questions: What will the Conference mean when it speaks of the Church? What is the nature and mission of the Church, with whose attitude toward the State and political problems Oxford is to be concerned?

An identical note was struck by the Archbishop of York in his opening address as President of the Edinburgh Conference. "We tend," he said, "to take the Church for granted and to discuss its functions and relationships without pausing to clarify the meaning of either; and without asking how far the view which we take of these relationships is already determined by our doctrine of the Church. The ten-year-long discussion since Lausanne," continued the Archbishop, "has persuaded me that the main subject of the difference is the nature of the Church, its function, and all our other differences flow from this." We have to ask, for example, "whether the nature of the Church and its function is such that its structure is vitally relevant to its function, or whether its structure is to be determined from time to time by considerations of practical utility."

In view of such a conviction on the part of leaders of both Conferences that the Oxford and Edinburgh discussion has to reach down to a profounder level, the present study outline presents, as the final number in the Oxford Discussion Series, the subject of the Church: Its Nature, Its Functions, and Its Unity. No single question cuts so deep as this does into the heart of the entire ecumenical problem.

This made its incidental consideration at both Conferences inevitable. Since, however, this subject was not formally treated by either Conference, the Oxford and Edinburgh reports do not in themselves furnish adequate materials for its discussion. In neither is the topic systematically presented.

(*) W. A. Visser 't Hooft and J. H. Oldham.

The present outline, consequently, while it presents the text of major sections of the reports bearing upon the nature, functions, and unity of the Church, also supplements them by reference to the 1927 Lausanne Conference on Faith and Order (which did make a formal finding on the nature of the Church) and by material from the preliminary studies made in connection with the two Conferences.

In order to bring these materials into coherent form for study, additional explanatory materials have seemed also to be required. For these additions, the editors are responsible. They should be carefully scrutinized by the reader with reference to their adequacy and fidelity to the Conferences, whose thinking they try to represent.

THE CHURCH AS WE KNOW IT

The Church as we know it in the world is neither one, nor holy, nor universal; hence, to confess one holy Church universal is to confess a seeming contradiction. Not only is there a profound contrast between the Church of faith as God purposes and creates it, and the Church of external fact, faulty and divided; but the Church is not able even to formulate the central problems of its faith and life, except in terms of this paradox.

The Church is paradoxical as to the nature of its underlying reality. It belongs at the same time to two orders of being. It is both an earthly institution and a divine life. It presents both these aspects in the experience of believers; but is apprehended by faith as, nevertheless, one Church.

The Church is paradoxical as to its quality. It is both divinely holy and sin-infected. The mood of Oxford and Edinburgh alike was one of profound humility and deep penitence. As confessed at Oxford, the chief corporate sins of the Churches were their failure to transcend the world's standards; their participation in the cruel and destructive conflicts of nation, race, class, and culture; and their frequent part in accentuating and perpetuating these evils.

Edinburgh was keenly aware of the more subtle sins of complacency and self-sufficiency; of inertia and prejudice; of unteachableness and impatience with others; and of toleration within the Church itself of divisions contrary to the will of God.

In spite of these corporate sins, the unfailing life of Christ in the Church and the undefeated energies of the Spirit maintain it in an essentially holy character. The mixture of its qualities may obscure this fact, but cannot destroy it.

The Church is paradoxical as to its unity. It is hurtfully and scandalously divided; yet even while this is confessed, it can also affirm an experienced unity deeper than division.

Consider the Church as it confronted itself in the 1937 World Conferences and as it showed itself to the world in that connection. Its outstanding characteristic was that of being divided. The structure of the Conferences themselves was that of a divided Church. They were temporary associations of representatives of some one hundred and thirty separate bodies, from more than fifty countries and political sub-divisions. Some twenty-five churches were represented at Oxford, but not at Edinburgh.

The Conferences united participating churches in counsel only. They most carefully avoided infringing the complete autonomy of the separate bodies. At the end the Conference did not formally *adopt* any conclusions, but simply *commended* their reports to the attention of the separate churches.

Moreover, the Edinburgh invitation was definitely limited to churches which "accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour." This doctrinal basis shut out some churches which are nevertheless attached, historically, to the Christian tradition. Divisions, then, were inherent; both in structure and the circumstances of the Conferences.

In spite of this essential situation, both Conferences registered important progress in the unity of the Church, and were able to strike a hopeful note with respect to the future progress in that direction. The most conspicuous evidence of it is the growth of the two major ecumenical movements themselves; the final convergence of the streams of Life and Work and Faith and Order; and the proposal to merge both in a permanent World Council of Churches.

The Edinburgh report begins with a condensed narrative of concrete progress in unity, covering more than sixty specific cases during the past decade. Oxford offered no similar survey or progress, but steady and continuous growth of unity in Life and Work on every continent as a well established fact.

Not all of the unions attempted or accomplished have been of one sort; and any appraisal of them as forward movements obviously depends upon the kind of unity one believes in. This, in turn, depends upon some view of the nature of the Church, and throws one back upon our basic question.

Again, even taking all movements toward unity together, the rate of progress, though accelerated, will not be sufficient to bring the goal near in any immediate future. Hence the mood of humiliation and confession in which the contemplation of the present divided state of the Church ended both at Oxford and Edinburgh, and must end.

On the other hand, the reality of objective progress toward unity and the fresh confirmation of hope by inner unity experienced at the two Conferences served to counterbalance this mood of humiliation. In the apt phrase of Dr. Adolf Keller, *divisiveness* was largely overcome, even though *division* was not healed. The final note of the Conferences, accordingly, was one of thankful recognition of the gains made and of eagerness to hasten and complete existing spiritual unity in some form of visible union. (Edinburgh Report, Chapter VI (i).)

The situation is thus *paradoxical at its core,* in that the Church is after all both what we know and what God purposes and creates. It is both, historically, and at present, a company of men, professing the name of Christ but behaving very unworthily of that profession; it is also an act of God. It is both an empirical Church and an essential Church. This is its nature on earth; and, so far as one can see, must continue to be its nature until the full coming of the Kingdom of God shall solve the paradox.

THE CHURCH AS GOD PURPOSES AND CREATES IT

The essential Church *originates and subsists in the activity of God.* "It is constituted," declared the Lausanne statement of 1927, "by His own will; not by the will or consent or beliefs of men, whether as individuals or as societies, though He uses the will of men as His instrument. Of this Church, Jesus Christ is the head; the Holy Spirit its continuing life."

Oxford re-echoes this affirmation when it says: "The source of (its) unity is not the consenting movement of men's wills; it is Jesus Christ, Whose one life flows through the Body and subdues the many wills to His."

Like the Gospel and the sending of the life-giving Spirit, it *originates in God's grace,* unmerited by men.

Just as the Word was incarnate in a certain age and nation, so, according to God's purpose, *the Church appears in time and place.* The words, deeds, life, and character of our Lord; His suffering, death, and resurrection, culminated in the gift of the Spirit and in the life which He gives to the Church which is His Body. (Edinburgh Report, Chapter III (i).)

The Church *continues as the Body of Christ,* the organ of the Holy Spirit; a redemptive community under His perpetual guidance and administration.

Other perpetual marks of the essential Church are universally confessed and agreed to so long as one remains within the mood and imagery of Scripture, prayer, and psalm, and does not attempt exact definition.

The Church is a *divinely endowed society.* The gifts of the ascended Lord are conveyed to the whole fellowship of the Church, the Spirit dividing to every man severally as He will.

Christ makes *His presence in the Church perpetually effective* in the preaching of the Word, in the administration of the Sacraments, in prayer offered in His name and through the newness of life of faithful disciples. Even though man prove faithless, Christ will remain faithful to the promise of His presence and will so continue until the consummation of all things.

Christ's presence through *the Spirit guides the Church into all the truth* and fills it unto all the fullness of God.

Yet even in these realms of common agreement, different Christians lay definite emphases on one or another aspect of the truth, and are not united in the explanations which they offer of the truth which they unitedly hold.

In brief, the essential Church of faith is entangled with the paradoxical church of experience, beyond the power of Oxford and Edinburgh or any other human agency to disentangle.

Other outstanding difficulties relating to the nature and the function of the Church are pointed out in the Edinburgh report and will challenge any who study the report in detail.

THE CHURCH THE COMMUNITY OF SAINTS

The point on which Oxford and Edinburgh lay the greatest common stress relates to the Church as the community of saints; and it is at this point that the problem of its function most inevitably arises.

"I believe in the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints." The Church is *a community-creating reality.* This is the objective side of the inwardly experienced communion of saints.

"The Body of Christ," says the Edinburgh report (Chapter II (iv)), is "the blessed company of all faithful people in heaven or on earth, the communion of saints;" and any conception which "confines this communion to the Church on earth alone is defective" (Chapter IV).

The community of saints is an objective reality antecedent to any experience of unity on the part of its members. Those who are united in Christ "have in that fact a supernatural bond of oneness which subsists in spite of divergences in defining the divine mystery of the Lord." (Chapter III (VIII).)

Unity in Christ *is felt and expressed as unity with fellow Christians.* "It is not," says the Oxford report, "a theme for aspiration; it is an experienced fact."

"We have lifted up our hearts together in prayer; we have sung the same hymns; together we have read the same holy Scriptures. We recognize in one another, across the barriers of our separation, a common Christian outlook and a common standard of values. We are therefore assured of a unity deeper than our divisions." (Edinburgh Affirmation of Unity).

The primary function of the Church is to realize more completely this communion. Let the Church be the Church!

The essential Church is *apprehended by faith and known inwardly* by its faithful members. With respect to its ministries to them no question arises. Its function is "through the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments and through Christian education, to make them confessed Christians, conscious of the reality of salvation." Pastoral care, fellowship, mutual help, discipline, and intercession realize community in the inner life of the Church.

Of the *function of the Church toward the world* the Edinburgh report speaks only briefly and in most general terms. It is to be "God's missionary to the World," and "to guide her members to promote justice, peace, and goodwill among all men and through the whole extent of life."

The Oxford Conference, on the contrary, stressed *the relation of Church and world as the essential and almost exclusive theme.*

The real crux of the Oxford discussions concerns the sense in which the Church contributes to, or is the organ of, the Kingdom of God on earth. This was the common problem explored with reference to the community, race, the economic order, the State, war, and education.

The Church is *an actual world society*. "It is called to be in itself a fellowship which binds men together in their common dependence on God and overlaps all barriers of social status, race, or nationality." The sovereign claims of this loyalty to all others must prove its supremacy over cultural misunderstandings, class conflicts, or even war.

But in addition to supplying a binding fellowship for its own members, *can the Church function as a saving fellowship* in the life of the world? Millions of men are desperately seeking to realize a community of their own, based, for example, on the life and fellowship which communism or totalitarianism at the same time offer and falsify. Can the Church be an effective substitute for secular schemes of social organization, rallying human loyalties under the standard of the divine life, and saving a disintegrating world from chaos?

No such capacity resides in the Church as we now know it, nor can ever be reached by human achievement. It is *the essential Church,* the Body of Christ created by God in Christ, whose One life flows through it, which alone can dare to offer itself as the agency of God's victory on earth.

But stubborn differences exist in Christian convictions concerning the *relation of the actual Church to the coming of the Kingdom of God.* Some stress the continuity of the Church and the Kingdom, so that "the coming of the Kingdom is to be seen in the progress of the Church in the world, and the work wrought through believers, or even in the work of all men of good will the world over." Others maintain that the Kingdom is known by faith only and that "the victory of Christ is hidden and destined to remain hidden until the end of this age." (Edinburgh Report, Chapter III (v).)

On the first alternative, Christians may work on in confidence, feeling that each small advance brings the goal nearer, and that they are really contributing to the divine event. On the second, they may only trust and wait, uncertain whether their work has any significance, except that obedience and faith go into it. The essential springs of action are all but blocked. "Man is nothing; God is all."

THE ONE CHURCH UNIVERSAL

Whether or not its appointed role is to supply a principle and power of social cohesion competent and effective to save the world from chaos, *the Church itself must be united.* Its essential nature and its character as a community of saints require that it be one and universal. "We are convinced," reads the Edinburgh affirmation, "that our unity of spirit and aim must be embodied . . . though we do not yet clearly see what outward form it should take."

Behind this acknowledgment of differences of opinion as to outward form, the Edinburgh report implicitly recognizes three *criteria which enable the Church to define* its goal more precisely.

First, *ultimate unity must correspond to the essential nature of the Church* "as the body of Christ, and therefore, in principle and ideal, one." But what does this principle imply? The greatest difficulty in the way of agreement is found "when some form of church government or order is considered part of the faith;" that is to say, of the nature of the Church as revealed.

The focal point of disagreement is located by the Edinburgh report in the *two antithetical conceptions of the Church*; the one insisting that its full and permanent pattern is divinely given in the Scriptures, in orders, in creeds, and in worship; the other, with equal insistence stressing the individual experience of divine grace as the principle of the "gathered" Church, resting Christian assurance upon vital union with Christ and the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit, and allowing the Church's structure to be determined from time to time by considerations of practical utility.

The report concludes that variations in doctrine, organization, worship, and types of piety, are *combinations of issues inherent in the two contrasted types of Church* which have just been referred to. "We do not minimize the difficulties which these contrasted types of Church present to our movement, nor are we willing to construe them as being due mainly to misunderstandings or to sin. It is our hope and prayer that through the guidance of the Holy Spirit they may, in God's good time, be overcome."

Meanwhile, it is our duty, says the Report, to attempt by study to enter still more sympathetically into the experience of others and to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

In spite of the discovery of such stubborn differences a detailed study of the Report will reveal highly important points at which *progress in agreement on matters involving the nature and function of the Church* was made; so that the prospect of fuller agreement in the future rests upon the solid ground of recent experience, and is not merely a pious hope.

A second requirement of the kind of unity which the Church should seek is that it *must be such as will convince the world.* Essential unity known inwardly by faith, even in its fresh validation by experience, is not enough. Unity must be embodied in a way that will make it manifest in the world. The world simply does not see why a Church, as inwardly united as the Church says it is, should continue such manifestly feeble and ridiculous divisions. Cooperative action, says the Edinburgh report, is not enough, "since cooperative action in itself fails to manifest to the world the true character of the Church as one community of faith and word, as well as of service."

Finally, any acceptable version of *ultimate unity must* be such as will *express the inner reality and meaning of* the *community of saints.* Inner unity must rise to the full implications of the concept of community. It can

obviously permit of no barrier between Christians with respect to participation in the central symbol and mystery of the Lord's Table, nor between different types of experience within the Christian community.

How far the different kinds of movements toward unity already under way, and the different degrees of inner likeness implied in any one of them, fit these criteria of ultimate unity, the Edinburgh report does not pretend to say. The Church is one in God's purpose and must be united in order to fulfill its function in the world. Yet *the visible goal is not known in terms of the precise form and outline of the united Church* of the future.

What can be discerned is the *direction of advance,* and the rather *limited next steps,* which the Church should now take.

As set forth in the Edinburgh report, these next steps may be grouped under seven heads:

1—Spiritual preparation and religious expression;

2—Adequate educational program;

3—Professional education and continued research;

4—Continued cooperation and service;

5—Modification of ecclesiastical practice and structure in behalf of unity;

6—Adoption of common major policies;

7—Creation of a more adequate ecumenical organization.

The most conspicuous next step recommended by the Oxford and Edinburgh Conferences is the establishment of a *World Council of Churches.* Such a Council would function as the organ of the one Church already inwardly united and would set its face toward the goal of more complete outward unity according to an ultimate pattern not yet determined.

It is most important to consider what is and what is not proposed in the World Council. What is proposed is a body representative of the Churches "with a view to facilitating the more effective action of the Christian Church within the modern world."

The proposed organization will have no power to legislate for the Churches, nor to commit them to any action without their consent. Its only sanction will be such measure of leadership as it may win by the value of its services to the Churches and the merits of its undertakings.

The new Council will guard itself against being a one-sidedly clerical agency. The preliminary statement is careful to record "that in certain spheres the predominant voice in its utterance must be that of lay people holding posts of responsibility and influence in the secular world."

According to the preliminary statement, it will be within the responsibility of the new body: (1) to carry on the work of the two World Conferences; (2) to facilitate corporate action by the Churches; (3) to promote cooperation in study; (4) to promote the growth of ecumenical consciousness in the Churches; (5) to consider the establishment of an ecumenical journal; (6) to consider the establishment of communication with denomi-

national federations of world-wide scope as well as with the Movements named in the preceding paragraph; (7) to call World Conferences on specific subjects as occasion requires.

As to internal structure, it is proposed that the World Council of Churches function through a general assembly of approximately two hundred members, representative of the Churches of all the world, meeting every five years, and a central council of approximately sixty members meeting annually as a sort of executive committee.

The plan for the Council was approved in principle by the Oxford and Edinburgh Conferences, each acting independently, and a joint committee authorized by them is now at work on the preliminary steps for carrying out the undertaking.

Beyond this program of immediate limited objectives shines *the distant goal.* Facing this way, the Church's testimony, as it ever must, mingles together the two notes of urgency and assurance: first, "that the cause of Christian unity is implicit in God's word and should be treated by the Christian conscience as an urgent call from God" (Edinburgh Report, page 14); and second, that Jesus Christ our Lord, makes us one in spite of our divisions; binding "in one those who by many wordly claims are set at variance; that the world may at last find peace and unity in Him; to Whom be glory forever." (Edinburgh Affirmation of Unity.)

STUDY ONE

THE CHURCH AS WE KNOW IT

STUDY: Introduction (pages 4-6.)

Excerpts from Reports (pages 13-16.)

(If possible read carefully the full report of the Edinburgh Conference.)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Reread pages 3-4 of the Introduction:

1. Do you feel the lack of clear definition of the Church in those parts of the Oxford and Edinburgh Reports which you have read? Are Dr. Oldham and the Archbishop of York right as to the need of a preliminary study of the nature and functions of the Church? From your viewpoint, are the materials presented in this Outline well organized as an aid for the study of the Reports? How would you like to rearrange them?

2. Do you think that the Oxford and Edinburgh Conferences were more truly evidences of unity or of disunity? Is it true that the churches came separated and went away separated? What seems to have happened to the spirit of divisiveness? Do you feel that the agreements reached were few or many? What do you make of the fact that the Reports were "submitted for consideration" rather than "adopted"?

3. How rapidly do you think progress in the unity of the Church is being made? How significant to you are the objective forms which it has recently taken?

4. How significant are the gains in "experienced" unity asserted by those who attended the Conferences?

(Read statements from Edinburgh Affirmation of Unity and Oxford Message Excerpts on page 16.)

5. Do you feel the Introduction to this Outline right in representing that the paradoxical quality of the Church is one of its primary characteristics? Can you make a comprehensive statement about the Church which avoids recognizing its paradoxical quality? How would you state it? Can a thing at the same time be sinful and holy; united and divided?

EXCERPTS FROM THE REPORTS OF THE OXFORD AND EDINBURGH WORLD CONFERENCES WITH COLLATERAL DATA

I — THE CHURCH AS WE KNOW IT

(NOTE: The Reports from which these Excerpts are taken were not adopted by the World Conferences, but only received and "submitted for the consideration of the participating churches." The books and reports produced by the preparatory Commissions were "commended to the churches for study.")

Inner Unity—Outward Division:

"Our unity is of heart and spirit. We are divided in the outward forms of our life in Christ, because we understand differently His will for His Church. We believe, however, that a deeper understanding will lead us towards a united apprehension of the truth as it is in Jesus." (Edinburgh Affirmation of Unity.)

Classification of Churches Sending Delegates to 1937 World Conferences:

	Edinburgh		*Additional at Oxford*	
Families	*Churches*	*Countries*	*Churches*	*Countries*
Anglican	14	14	1	1
Baptist	7	5	4	4
Congregational	7	7	.....	.....
Churches of Christ	1	1	.....	.....
Disciples of Christ	2	1	.....	.....
Society of Friends	4	3	.....	.....
Lutheran	18	17	2	2
Methodist	14	10	3	3
Old Catholic	1	1	.....	.....
Greek Orthodox	13	13	1	1
Other Eastern Churches	4	4	.....	.....
Presbyterian and Reformed	31	22	3	3
United	5	4	.....	.....
Unclassified	9	8	11	9

(Condensed from Official Lists of Delegates)

Objective Progress in Unity—Cooperative Action:

An adequate statement of objective progress in the field of cooperative action in recent years would include the expanding life and service of well known non-ecclesiastical organizations of the Church, such as the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations and the organized youth movement, but would be chiefly concerned with ecclesiastical cooperation, that is to say, between the churches, as such. This is instanced in the world

organizations of the several denominational families; in inter-church movements for good-will, philanthropy, and united aid, like the Central Bureau for Relief of the Evangelical Churches of Europe; in the inter-church federations and councils which have become well established features of church life in England, Canada, and the United States, as well as in numerous European countries; in the more specialized cooperative agencies relating to limited fields, such as missionary administration through the Councils of Home Mission Boards, and education through the International Council of Religious Education.

Local church union in America has also shown notable progress in a variety of developments, sometimes taking non-denominational form, that of federation between two or more local denominational churches without severance of allegiance to their own denominations; or again, setting up agreements whereby a denominational church is recognized by all denominations as a church of an entire community in which it may function in behalf of united Christianity.

Organized cooperation in the foreign mission field is represented by the expanding life and activity of the International Missionary Council, representing twenty-six constituent groups and National Christian Councils, or similar agencies, in fifteen countries, to which are to be added the very numerous cooperative enterprises in particular institutions.

The unity of cooperative action makes the smallest theoretical demands upon the churches. It adds a certain machinery for co-action but leaves the churches as separately organized bodies without change of structure or more fundamental relationship. For this reason cooperative action is sometimes depreciated as not really involving or tending toward the more fundamental unity of the Church. In order to correct this opinion, the Edinburgh Conference declared:

"Church 'federations' are the most common expressions of such unity, and one of the most hopeful paths to understanding and brotherly relations. We believe federation, so construed, is a promising approach to more complete forms of unity. We do not share the fears, often expressed, that 'federation' in this sense will obscure the goal of a fuller unity or postpone its attainment. The experience of many churches in many lands forbids such fears, since they run counter to the facts." (Chapter VI (ii).) (Text supplied by the Editor.)

Objective Progress in Unity—Ecclesiastical Phases:

"Looking back to the first great Conference on Faith and Order held in Lausanne in 1927, we thankfully recognize the *real progress* made since then *in the field of church union* . . . We cannot better open this report than by offering a factual summary of the most important steps taken during the last ten years in every continent of the world.

"The specific unions or approaches to union which the decade has witnessed have sometimes concerned churches of different nations, as, for

example, those between the Anglican communion on the one side and the Old Catholic churches of Europe and the churches of the Orthodox communion on the other; but they have generally been confined to churches within their several nations. A special complication has been experienced in connection with mutual approaches among the younger churches, particularly in the Orient and in Africa, the control of which still rests partially with parent churches in the older Christian lands.

"The total number of active unity movements is impressive. Nearly half of them have occurred in North America, a fact which reflects the exceptionally large number of previous divisions needing to be healed. And nearly as many are to be found in Asia as in Europe, a fact to be explained in part by the immense pressure of non-Christian civilizations which forces the churches together, and in part by the practical necessities of the situation. The majority of the achieved unions have thus occurred between churches not previously sundered by the profounder differences of theological or cultural tradition; so that, in the main, unity has as yet been fully reached only in the easier situations.

"Moreover, the group of movements towards unity which marks the period represents very different stages of progress. Some have only reached the stage of vague or tentative exploration. Others have gone as far as definite negotiations regarding terms and conditions of union. Still others, as in the recent conversations between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland and the associated churches in both countries, have suffered indefinite postponement. Some have even had to be abandoned. A somewhat larger number has been consummated. It is a matter for great satisfaction to be able to record that all unions which have been in existence long enough to be tested have been distinctly successful in the eyes of those primarily concerned.

"The schemes attempted illustrate all the usual meanings of the word unity. Some schemes have sought and some have secured mutual recognition between churches, and thus have laid the basis for intercommunion. As an example, we may quote the agreement establishing full intercommunion between churches of the Anglican communion and the Old Catholic churches. An agreement has happily been reached and ratified between the Church of England and the Church of Finland, and negotiations are in progress with the Churches of Latvia and Esthonia. Other churches have been content with more or less complete federation. About three-quarters of all the cases recorded, however, have contemplated the actual corporate union of two or more previously separate bodies. This is exemplified in such conspicuous instances as the reunion of the Scottish Presbyterian Churches in 1929 and that of the English Methodists in 1932, as the union of three churches in Canada, in 1925, as the formation of the Church of Christ in China in 1927, combining Baptist, Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, United Brethren, the United Church of Canada, and independent Chinese churches founded by six English-speaking nations. There are to be borne in mind, also, the contemplated

unions of the French Reformed Churches and of the chief Methodist Churches of the United States. All these cases significantly change former ecclesiastical structure and constitute single churches.

"Many of the great denominational types of churches represented in the Faith and Order movement have been involved in these recent developments. Some have been primarily interested in the realization of a particular form or kind of unity. Others have limited themselves to the uniting of bodies of the same religious type and tradition. But highly significant unions in the United States, Canada, and China have brought into single communions, churches of very divergent traditions and polity, so that the record of the immediate past does not suggest any necessity for waiting upon unions of denominational families before wider union is attempted.

"Obviously any estimate of the very varied forms of mutual approach depends upon the kind of unity one believes to be important and on the true objective. Schemes of a denominational kind might in some cases prove in a few years' time to have strengthened confessional consciousness and so to have postponed ecumenical union by widening the gulfs between the large churches thus created. Some may see in most of the recent movements only minor cases mainly remedying, on a local or regional scale, certain practical disadvantages of disunion. Intercommunion has not been widely extended during the decade; and no union has been consummated between a church of radically 'Catholic' and one of radically 'Evangelical' tradition. While, then, the significance of the progress made must not be overstated, the trend towards unity is nevertheless marked both in magnitude and in character. It is widespread throughout the world. It occurs in a wide variety of forms. It is vital, relevant to actual situations. It is making increasing appeal to the heart and conscience of all Christian men." (Edinburgh Report, Chapter I.)

Experienced Unity:

"We have lifted up our hearts together in prayer; we have sung the same hymns; together we have read the same Holy Scriptures. We recognize in one another, across the barriers of our separation, a common Christian outlook and a common standard of values. We are therefore assured of a unity deeper than our divisions." (Edinburgh Affirmation of Unity.)

"Despite our unfaithfulness God has done great things through His Church. One of the greatest is this: that, notwithstanding the tragedy of our divisions and our inability in many important matters to speak with a united voice, there exists an actual world-fellowship. Our unity in Christ is not a theme for aspiration; it is an experienced fact. We can speak of it with boldness because our Conference is an illustration of it. We are drawn from many nations and from many different communions, from Churches with centuries of history behind them and from the younger Churches whose story covers but a few decades; but we are one in Christ." (Oxford Message to the Churches.)

STUDY TWO

THE CHURCH AS GOD PURPOSES AND CREATES IT

STUDY: Introduction (pages 6-7.)
Excerpts from Reports (pages 17-19.)
(If possible read carefully Chapters II and III of the Edinburgh Report.)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what sense do you believe that the Church originates in the will of God as other major social institutions do not? Did God create the family and the nation? Did all the separated branches of the Church originate in the will of God? Do you think it important to keep affirming that the Church is not man-made and is nothing apart from God?

2. What do you understand by the Church as the "sphere of redemption" apart from which "man cannot normally attain full knowledge of God?" (Excerpts, page 2.) What qualification, if any, do you want to attach to this statement: "What are the essential 'marks' of the Church, the qualities which are always present in it and by which it may be known?"

3. Was Pentecost the beginning of the Church on earth? In what sense did the work, teaching, and resurrection of Christ "culminate" in the gift of the Spirit, and the life which He gives to the Church which is His Body? (Edinburgh Report, Chapter III (i).) Does this mean to you that the Church is the climax of the Incarnation?

4. What items in the teaching of the Reports about the Church still seem to you to be hard to understand; doubtful; only partially true; or false?

(Let the group draw up a set of propositions about the Church on the basis of the Reports, and rate each one as (1) true; (2) more true than false; (3) more false than true; (4) false.)

5. What conceptions of the Church does your study group agree upon? On what does it divide? Do its points of disagreement correspond to divisions of opinion recorded in the body of the Reports?

(Assign this last question to someone to report upon at the next session of the group.)

EXCERPTS FROM THE REPORTS OF THE OXFORD AND EDINBURGH WORLD CONFERENCES WITH COLLATERAL DATA

II — THE CHURCH AS GOD PURPOSES AND CREATES IT

The Source of Unity in God:

". . . Unity does not consist in the agreement of our minds or the consent of our wills. It is founded in Jesus Christ Himself, Who lived,

died and rose again to bring us to the Father and Who through the Holy Spirit dwells in His Church. We are one because we are all the objects of the love and grace of God and called by Him to witness in all the world to His glorious gospel. . . .

"The unity of this fellowship is not built up from its constituent parts like a federation of different states. It consists in the sovereignty and redeeming acts of its one Lord. The source of unity is not the consenting movement of men's wills; it is Jesus Christ whose one life flows through the Body and subdues the many wills to His." (Oxford Message to the Churches.)

The Church:

"The Church, then, is the body of those on whom the call of God rests to witness to the grace and truth of God. To this visible body the word 'Ecclesia' is normally applied in the New Testament, and to it the calling of God belongs. It is the sphere of redemption. Apart from the Church, man cannot normally attain full knowledge of God nor worship him in truth.

"Different churches differ in their use of the term 'Church.' Some would apply the term not only to the visible redeemed and redemptive community, but also to the invisible company of the fully redeemed; for only when the word is used in this sense would it be right to say, 'extra ecclesiam nulla salus.' But the invisible Church is no ideal Platonic community distinct from the visible Church on earth. The invisible Church and the visible Church are inseparably connected though their limits are not exactly coterminous. Others regard the use of the term 'Church' with reference to this invisible company of true Christians known only to God as misleading and unscriptural. To speak of this invisible body as the true Church conveys the disastrous suggestions that the true Church need not be visible and that the visible Church need not be true. We all, however, recognize that the number of those whom God has brought into newness of life and joy in the Holy Ghost and who have made personal response to the forgiving love of God, has limits hidden from human vision and known only to God." (Edinburgh Report, Chapter III (iv).)

The Church Constituted on Earth:

"We are at one in confessing belief in the *holy catholic church.* We acknowledge that through Jesus Christ, particularly through the fact of His resurrection, of the gathering of His disciples round their crucified, risen, and victorious Lord, and of the coming of the Holy Spirit, God's almighty will constituted the Church on earth. It is the body of Christ, whose members derive their life and oneness from their one living Head; and thus it is nothing apart from Him, but is in all things dependent upon the power of salvation which God has committed to His Son.

"The presence of the ascended Lord in the Church, His Body, is effected by the power of the one Spirit, Who conveys to the whole fellowship the gifts of the ascended Lord, dividing to every man severally as He will, guides it into all the truth and fills it unto all the fullness of God. . . .

"Christ's presence in the Church has been perpetual from its foundation and this presence He makes effective and evident in the preaching of the Word, in the faithful administration of the sacraments, in prayer offered in His name and through the newness of life whereby He enables the faithful to bear witness to Himself. Even though men often prove faithless, Christ will remain faithful to the promise of His presence and will so continue till the consummation of all things." (Edinburgh Report, Chapter III (iii).)

Body of Christ and Organ of Grace by the Holy Spirit:

"We agree that the Church is the Body of Christ and the blessed company of all faithful people, whether in heaven or on earth, the communion of saints. It is at once the *realization of God's gracious purposes* in creation and redemption, and the *continuous organ of God's grace in Christ* by the Holy Spirit, Who is its pervading life, and Who is constantly hallowing all its parts . . . God bestows His grace in the Church on its members through His Word and Sacraments and in the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit." (Edinburgh Report, Chapter II (iv).)

STUDY THREE

THE CHURCH THE COMMUNITY OF SAINTS

STUDY: Introduction (pages 7-8.)
Excerpts from Reports (pages 20-21.)
(If possible read carefully the Oxford Report on "Church and Community" and the Edinburgh Report, Chapter IV.)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Do you accept the maxim: "Let the Church be the Church?" (Oxford Message to the Churches, page 26.)

2. What do you think are the Church's most important functions with respect to its own members?

3. What are its chief functions with respect to the "world"?

4. What has the Church to do with "bringing in the Kingdom"? Is the world hopeless? What do you think the Church under God can do to save secular society? Is the mood of the Oxford Report more or less pessimistic than that of American Christianity generally? Why?

5. In the light of the Oxford and Edinburgh Reports and messages, what is the Church's ground of confidence as it confronts the world? What do you think the actual chances are that the Church will achieve sufficient inner energy and outer unity to constitute an effective rallying center in the present crisis of humanity and the threat of social disintegration?

(Note that the Oxford Message to the Churches as printed below (pages 26-30) summarizes the topics covered by the previous Oxford Discussion Outlines, and may be used to review former discussions.)

EXCERPTS FROM THE REPORTS OF THE OXFORD AND EDINBURGH WORLD CONFERENCES WITH COLLATERAL DATA

III — THE CHURCH THE COMMUNITY OF SAINTS

The Supreme Tie that Binds:

"All who accept Jesus Christ as Son of God and their Lord and Saviour, and realize their dependence upon God's mercy revealed in Him, have in that fact a *supernatural bond of oneness* which subsists in spite of divergences in defining the divine mystery of the Lord." (Edinburgh Report, Chapter III (VIII).)

The Church's Function Toward Her Own Members and Toward the World:

"*The function of the Church* is to glorify God in adoration and sacrificial service and to be God's missionary to the world. She is to bear witness to God's redeeming grace in Jesus Christ in her corporate life; to

proclaim the good news to every creature and to make disciples of all nations, bringing Christ's commandments to communities as well as to individuals.

"In relation to those who belong to her fellowship or who are placed under her influence, the function of the Church is through the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, and through Christian education, to make them into convinced Christians conscious of the reality of salvation. The needs of individual souls call for pastoral care and for a fellowship in the things of the Spirit, through which the members provoke one another to good works, and to walk worthily of their calling, by true friendship, mutual help and consolation and the exercise of loving discipline. She is to intercede for all her members, especially for those who suffer for their faith, and for all mankind.

"The Church must proclaim the righteousness of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and thus encourage and guide her members to promote justice, peace, and good will among all men and through the whole extent of life. The Church is thus called to do battle against the powers of evil and to seek the glory of God in all things, looking to the day when His Kingdom shall come in the fullness of its power." (Edinburgh Report, Chapter III (vi).)

Church and Kingdom:

"The gospel of Jesus Christ bears witness to the reality both of the Church and of the Kingdom of God. The Church rejoices in the Kingdom of God as present whenever man obeys the will of God. But the Church always looks with glad expectation to the consummation of the Kingdom in the future, since Christ the King, who is present and active in the Church through the Holy Spirit, is still to be manifested in glory. The Kingdom of God realizes itself now in a veiled form, until its full manifestation when God shall be all in all.

"Agreeing in this faith, we are not yet of one mind about (a) the relationship of the Church to the Kingdom; and (b) the extent to which the Kingdom is made known here and now.

"Some stress the kinship between the Church and the Kingdom; others the distinction between them. Some lay emphasis on the actual presence of the Kingdom within the Church and the continuity of the two, holding that the coming of the Kingdom can be seen in the progress of the Church in this world and the work wrought through believers, or even through all men of good will the world over. Others lay emphasis on the Kingdom that is to come in glory; and others again, think of the Kingdom as the ever-increasing reign of the righteousness and the love of God as manifested in Jesus Christ in every realm of life." (Edinburgh Report, Chapter III (v).)

STUDY FOUR

THE ONE CHURCH UNIVERSAL

STUDY: Introduction (pages 8-11.)

Excerpts from Reports (pages 22-25.)

(If possible read carefully the Edinburgh Report, Chapters V and VI.)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is unity one of the essential marks of the Church? Do you think that this means spiritual unity, only, or also external unity?

2. Why cannot the ultimate outward form of the united Church be determined now? What degree of unity do you believe is necessarily implied in the conception, "The Church, the Body of Christ?"

3. Do you hold that the particular form of organization found in your church is essential for the whole Church? Is this part of your "faith"? Do you know any fellow-Christian who thinks at least some of the peculiar forms of his church are essential marks of the Church Universal? For which features of his church do you understand him to claim universal authority?

4. As you understand the distinction made in the Edinburgh Report, would you classify your church "personal" or "authoritarian"; or does it hold a mediating position between these extremes? In what better terms would you define your church's position as to the issue raised by these terms?

5. Can the true direction of an advance toward unity be known when the precise goal is not?

EXCERPTS FROM THE REPORTS OF THE OXFORD AND EDINBURGH WORLD CONFERENCES WITH COLLATERAL DATA

IV — THE ONE CHURCH UNIVERSAL

The Penitence of a Divided Church:

"Everything which the New Testament teaches concerning the Church presupposes its essential unity. But we, as we confess our faith in the one Church, are conscious of a profound cleavage between that faith and the conditions of the present time.

"But we believe that the divisions of Christendom in every land are such as to hamper the manifestation of the unity of Christ's body. We deplore this with all our hearts; and we desire the conference to summon members of churches to such penitence that not only their leaders, but the

ordinary men and women who hear their message, may learn that the cause of Christian unity is implicit in God's word and should be treated by the Christian conscience as an urgent call from God." (Edinburgh Report, Chapter III (viii).)

Premise and Goal of Unity:

"We take as the premise of our findings and our recommendations the already existing and growing spiritual unity, experienced by Christians as love of one another. We believe that no visible unity, acceptable to God and to the people of God, can be achieved save on the foundation of this spiritual unity. We believe that our common experience of spiritual unity derives from the fundamental faith that the Church is the Body of Christ, and is, therefore, in principle and ideal, one. In trying to envisage the goal of our endeavors, we are not seeking to create something new; rather, we are attempting to discover under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the full nature of the Church created by God in Christ.

"Our goal is to realize the ideal of the Church as one living Body, worshipping and serving God in Christ, as the fulfilment of our Lord's prayers and of our prayers." (Edinburgh Report, Chapter VI (i).)

Chief Obstacles to Unity:

"We find that the obstacles most difficult *to overcome* consist of elements of 'faith' and 'order' combined, as when some form of church government or worship is considered a part of the faith.

"But we are led to the conclusion that behind all particular statements of the problem of corporate union, lie deeply divergent conceptions of the Church. For the want of any more accurate terms this divergence might be described as the contrast between 'authoritarian' and 'personal' types of Church.

"We have, on the one hand, an insistence upon a divine givenness in the Scriptures, in orders, in creeds, in worship. We have, on the other hand, an equally strong insistence upon the individual experience of divine grace, as the ruling principle of the 'gathered' Church, in which freedom is both enjoyed as a religious right and enjoined as a religious duty. . . .

"We do not minimize the difficulties which these contrasted types of Church present to our movement, nor are we willing to construe them as being due mainly to misunderstanding or to sin. It is our hope and prayer that through the guidance of the Holy Spirit they may, in God's good time, be overcome." (Edinburgh Report, Chapter VI (iv).)

Church Membership:

"Different Churches hold different views as to the basis of church membership. Some would hold that all who have been baptized and have not by deed or word repudiated their heritage belong to the church and are

to be regarded as members. Others would confine membership to those who have made an open profession of faith in Christ and in whose lives some measure of the spirit of Christ may be discerned.

"There are other important differences in this connection, some of which will be discussed in other chapters of this report." (Edinburgh Report, Chapter III (iv).)

Ground of Assurance:

"In their apprehension of this faith different persons lay a *different emphasis on one or another aspect.* Some lay greater stress on the perpetual and abiding Presence of Christ in His Body and with His people, while others lay greater stress on the fact that Christ is present only where His word is truly preached and received by faith.

"A point to be studied is in what degree the Christian depends ultimately for his assurance that he is in vital touch with Christ upon the possession of the ministry and the sacraments; upon the Word of God in the church; upon the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit; or upon all of these." (Edinburgh Report, Chapter III (iii).)

Unity of Cooperative Action:

"The unity which we seek may be conceived as a confederation or alliance of Churches for cooperative action. In all areas where common purposes and tasks exist, such action is already widely possible without violation of conscience. . . .

"We recognize that (existing)* federations for cooperative action should not be construed as (complete or adequate)* examples of 'federal union.' Certain of our members wish to be recorded as believing that 'federal union' is not merely the most we can achieve, but also the most that we should desire.

"We are agreed that cooperative action between Churches unable to achieve intercommunion or to look towards corporate union, and compelled by fidelity to conscience to remain separate bodies with separate loyalties, is not our final goal, since cooperative action in itself fails to manifest to the world the true character of the Church as one community of faith and worship, as well as of service." (Edinburgh Report, Chapter VI (ii).)

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* Editorial Addition.

Intercommunion:

"A second aspect of church unity is commonly indicated by the term 'intercommunion.' This is the fullest expression of a *mutual recognition between two or more churches.* Such recognition is also manifested in the exchange of membership and ministrations. We regard sacramental intercommunion as a necessary part of any satisfactory church unity. Such

intercommunion, as between two or more churches, implies that all concerned are true Churches or true branches of the one Church.

"We think that it should be pointed out that the word 'intercommunion' has at present several different connotations. In the fullest sense it means a relation between two or more Churches, in which the communion of each is open to all members of the other at all times. This is to be distinguished from relations in which the communion of one Church is 'open' to members of other Churches without complete reciprocal recognition and still more from the occasional welcoming of members of other Churches by a Church whose normal rule would exclude them. We believe that 'regularity' and 'mutuality' belong to the full meaning of intercommunion. When this term 'intercommunion' is used in discussion of church unity, its meaning should be clearly defined.

"We must note, also, the occasions on which at a gathering of Christian people united in a common enterprise, a Church has invited all who have full status in their own Churches to receive the holy communion, according to the rite of the inviting Church. This has occurred both at Oxford and at Edinburgh during the Conferences held this year. It is to be distinguished both from 'intercommunion' and 'open communion' as usually understood and from such 'joint celebration' as took place at Jerusalem in 1928." (Edinburgh Report, Chapter VI (iib).)

Corporate Union:

"The third form in which the final goal of our movement may be expressed presents, from the standpoint of definition, the greatest difficulties. It is commonly indicated by such terms as 'corporate union' or 'organic unity.'

"These terms are forbidding to many, as suggesting the idea of a compact governmental union involving rigid uniformity. We do not so understand them, and none of us desires such uniformity. On the contrary, what we desire is the unity of a living organism, with the diversity characteristic of the members of a healthy body.

"The idea of 'corporate union' must remain for the vast majority of Christians their ideal. In a Church so united the ultimate loyalty of every member would be given to the whole body and not to any part of it. Its members would move freely from one part to another and find every privilege of membership open to them. The sacraments would be the sacraments of the whole body. The ministry would be accepted by all as a ministry of the whole body." (Edinburgh Report, Chapter VI (iic).)

A MESSAGE FROM THE OXFORD CONFERENCE TO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

The delegates to the World Conference on Church, Community, and State, assembled at Oxford from July 12 to 26, 1937, send at the close of their deliberations the following message to the Churches of Christ throughout the world:—

In the name of Christ, greetings.

We meet at a time when mankind is oppressed with perplexity and fear. Men are burdened with evils almost insupportable and with problems apparently insoluble. Even in countries which are at peace unemployment and malnutrition sap men's strength of body, mind, and spirit. In other countries war does its "devil's work," and threatens to overwhelm us all in its limitless catastrophe.

Yet we do not take up our task as bewildered citizens of our several nations, asking if anywhere there is a clue to our problems; we take it up as Christians, to whom is committed "the word of reconciliation," that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."

The first duty of the Church, and its greatest service to the world, is that it be in very deed the Church—confessing the true faith, committed to the fulfilment of the will of Christ, its only Lord, and united in Him in a fellowship of love and service.

We do not call the world to be like ourselves, for we are already too like the world. Only as we ourselves repent, both as individuals and as corporate bodies, can the Church call men to repentance. The call to ourselves and to the world is to Christ.

Race and Nation

Despite our unfaithfulness God has done great things through His Church. One of the greatest is this—that, notwithstanding the tragedy of our divisions and our inability in many important matters to speak with a united voice, there exists an actual world-fellowship. Our unity in Christ is not a theme for aspiration; it is an experienced fact. We can speak of it with boldness because our Conference is an illustration of it. We are drawn from many nations and from many different communions, from Churches with centuries of history behind them and from the younger Churches whose story covers but a few decades; but we are one in Christ.

The unity of this fellowship is not built up from its constituent parts, like a federation of different States. It consists in the Sovereignty and redeeming acts of its one Lord. The source of unity is not the consenting movement of men's wills; it is Jesus Christ whose one life flows through the Body and subdues the many wills to His.

The Christian sees distinctions of race as part of God's purpose to enrich mankind with a diversity of gifts. Against racial pride or race-antagonism the Church must set its face implacably as rebellion against God. Especially, in its own life and worship there can be no place for barriers because of race or colour. Similarly the Christian accepts national communities as part of God's purpose to enrich and diversify human life. Every man is called of God to serve his fellows in the community to which he belongs. But national egotism tending to the suppression of other nationalities or of minorities is, no less than individual egotism, a sin against the Creator of all peoples and races. The deification of nation, race, or class, or of political or cultural ideas, is idolatry, and can only lead to increasing division and disaster.

On every side we see men seeking for a life of fellowship in which they experience their dependence on one another. But because community is sought on a wrong basis, the intensity of the search for it issues in conflict and disintegration. In such a world the Church is called to be in its own life that fellowship which binds men together in their common dependence on God and overleaps all barriers of social status, race, or nationality.

War and Peace

In consonance with its nature as true community, the Church will call the nations to order their lives as members of the one family of God. The universal Church, surveying the nations of the world, in every one of which it is now planted and rooted, must pronounce a condemnation of war unqualified and unrestricted. War can occur only as a fruit and manifestation of sin. This truth is unaffected by any question of what may be the duty of a nation which has to choose between entry upon war and a course which it believes to be a betrayal of right, or what may be the duty of a Christian citizen whose country is involved in war. The condemnation of war stands, and also the obligation to seek the way of freeing mankind from its physical, moral, and spiritual ravages. If war breaks out, then pre-eminently the Church must manifestly be the Church, still united as the one Body of Christ, though the nations wherein it is planted fight each other, consciously offering the same prayers that God's Name may be hallowed, His Kingdom come, and His will be done in both, or all, the warring nations. This fellowship of prayer must at all costs remain unbroken. The Church must also hold together in one spiritual fellowship those of its members who take different views concerning their duty as Christian citizens in time of war.

To condemn war is not enough. Many situations conceal the fact of conflict under the guise of outward peace. Christians must do all in their power to promote among the nations justice and peaceful co-operation, and the means of peaceful adjustment to altering conditions. Especially should Christians in more fortunate countries press the demand for justice on

behalf of the less fortunate. The insistence upon justice must express itself in a demand for such mitigation of the sovereignty of national states as is involved in the abandonment by each of the claim to be judge in its own cause.

Church and State

We recognize the State as being in its own sphere the highest authority. It has the God-given aim in that sphere to uphold law and order and to minister to the life of its people. But as all authority is from God, the State stands under His judgment. God is Himself the source of justice, of which the State is not lord but servant. The Christian can acknowledge no ultimate authority but God; his loyalty to the State is part of his loyalty to God, and must never usurp the place of that primary and only absolute loyalty.

The Church has duties laid upon it by God, which at all costs it must perform, among which the chief is to proclaim the Word of God and to make disciples, and to order its own life in the power of the Spirit dwelling in it. Because this is its duty it must do it, whether or not the State consents; and the State on its side should recognize the duty and assure full liberty for its performance. The Church can claim such liberty for itself only as it is also concerned for the rights and liberties of others.

Church and Economics

In the economic sphere the first duty of the Church is to insist that economic activities, like every other department of human life, stand under the judgment of Christ. The existence of economic classes presents a barrier to human fellowship which cannot be tolerated by the Christian conscience. Indefensible inequalities of opportunity in regard to education, leisure, and health continue to prevail. The ordering of economic life has tended to enhance acquisitiveness and to set up a false standard of economic and social success. The only forms of employment open to many men and women, or the fact that none is open, prevent them from finding a sense of Christian vocation in their daily life.

We are witnessing new movements which have arisen in reaction to these evils but which combine with their struggle for social justice the repudiation of all religious faith. Aware of the reality of sin, the Church knows that no change in the outward ordering of life can of itself eradicate social evil. The Church therefore cannot surrender to the Utopian expectations of these movements, and their Godlessness it must unequivocally reject; but in doing so it must recognize that Christians in their blindness to the challenging evils of the economic order have been partly responsible for the anti-religious character of these movements.

Christians have a double duty—both to bear witness to their faith within the existing economic order and also to test all economic institutions in the light of their understanding of God's will. The forces of evil against

which Christians have to contend are found not only in the hearts of men as individuals, but have entered into and infected the structure of society, and there also must be combated. The responsibility of the Church is to insist on the true relationship of spiritual and economic goods. Man cannot live without bread, and man cannot live by bread alone. Our human wealth consists in fellowship with God and in Him with our brethren. To this fellowship the whole economic order must be made subservient.

The questions which have mainly engaged the attention of the Conference are questions that can be effectively dealt with, in practice, only by the laity. Those who are responsible for the daily conduct of industry, administration, and public life must discover for themselves what is the right decision in an endless variety of concrete situations. If they are to receive the help they need in making responsible Christian decisions new types of ministry will have to be developed by the Church.

Youth and Education

The fulfilment of the tasks to which the Church is called to-day lies largely in the hands of youth. Many loud voices are calling on young people to give themselves to political and social ideals, and it is often hard for them to hear the voice of Jesus Christ who calls them to be servants of the eternal Kingdom. Yet many of the younger generation, often in spite of ridicule and sometimes of persecution, are turning to Him, and individually as well as in Christian youth movements devote themselves to the renewal of the life of the Churches and to making known the Good News of Christ by word and action. We rejoice in their brave witness.

In the education of youth the Church has a twofold task. First, it must be eager to secure for every citizen the fullest possible opportunity for the development of the gifts that God has bestowed on him. In particular, the Church must condemn inequality of educational opportunity as a main obstacle to fullness of fellowship in the life of the community.

While the Church is thus concerned with all education it has, also, a special responsibility to realize its own understanding of the meaning and end of education in the relation of life to God. In education, as elsewhere, if God is not recognized, He is ignored. The Church must claim the liberty to give a Christian education to its own children. It is in the field of education that the conflict between Christian faith and non-Christian conceptions of the ends of life, between the Church and an all-embracing community life which claims to be the source and goal of every human activity, is in many parts of the world most acute. In this conflict all is at stake, and the Church must gird itself for the struggle.

As we look to the future it is our hope and prayer that the Spirit of God may cause new life to break forth spontaneously in a multitude of different centres, and that there may come into being a large number of

"cells" of Christian men and women associated in small groups for the discovery of fresh ways in which they may serve God and their fellow-men.

We have deeply felt the absence from our fellowship of the Churches that have not been represented at the Conference. Our hearts are filled with anguish as we remember the suffering of the Church in Russia. Our sympathy and gratitude go out to our Christian brethren in Germany; we are moved to a more living trust by their steadfast witness to Christ and we pray that we may be given grace to bear the same clear witness to the Lord.

Toward a New World Unity

We have much to encourage us since the Conference at Stockholm twelve years ago. The sense of the unity of the Church in all the world grows stronger every year. We trust that this cause will be yet more fully served by the World Council of Churches, proposals for which have been considered by the Conference and commended to the Churches.

We have tried during these days at Oxford to look without illusion at the chaos and disintegration of the world, the injustices of the social order and the menace and horror of war. The world is anxious and bewildered and full of pain and fear. We are troubled yet we do not despair. Our hope is anchored in the living God. In Christ, and in the union of man with God and of man with man, which He creates, life even in face of all these evils has a meaning. In His Name we set our hands, as the servants of God and in Him of one another, to the task of proclaiming God's message of redemption, of living as His children, and of combating injustice, cruelty, and hate. The Church can be of good cheer; it hears its Lord saying, "I have overcome the world."

SUGGESTED LITERATURE

Report of the Edinburgh Conference: also the Affirmation of Unity, and the recommendations regarding the proposed World Council of Churches. 10 cents; in quantities — 50 copies, $4.00; 100 copies, $6.00; 500 copies, $25.00

Preliminary Reports of the Commission on the Church's Unity in Life and Worship:

A Decade of Objective Progress in Church Unity, by Dr. H. Paul Douglass. 140 pages. Harper, $1.50.

The Meanings of Unity, (Pamphlet No. 82) Harper, 40 cents.

The Communion of Saints, (Pamphlet No. 83) Harper, 40 cents.

The Non-Theological Factors in the Making and Unmaking of Church Union, (Pamphlet No. 84) Harper, 40 cents.

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